TOYS AND THEIR PLACE

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EDUCATION OF THE CHILD

ELIZABETH HARRISON

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FROM

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BY

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Old Homer, back in the past ages, shows us a charming picture of Nausicaa and her maidens, after a hard day's washing, resting themselves with a game of ball. Thus we see this most free and graceful plaything connected with that free and beautifully developed nation which has been the admiration of the world ever since. Plato has said, "The plays of children have the mightiest influence on the maintenance or non-maintenance of laws;" and again, "During earliest childhood, the soul of the nursling should be made cheerful and kind, by keeping away from him sorrow and fear and pain, by soothing him with sound of the pipe and of rhythmical movement." He still further advised that the children should be brought to the temples, and allowed to play under the supervision of nurses, presumably trained for that purpose. Here we see plainly foreshadowed the Kindergarten, whose foundation is "education by play"; as the study of the Kindergar-

ten system leads to the earnest, thoughtful consideration of the office of play, and the exact value which the plaything or toy has in the development of the child ; when this is once understood, the choice of what toys to give to children is easily made.

In the world of nature, we find the blossom comes before the fruit; in history, art arose long before science was possible; in the human race, the emotions are developed sooner than the reason. With the individual child it is the same; the childish heart opens spontaneously in play, the barriers are down, and the loving mother or the wise teacher can find entrance into the inner court as in no other way. The child's *sympathies* can be attracted towards an object, person, or line of conduct, much earlier than his reason can grasp any one of them. His emotional nature can and does receive impressions long before his intellectual nature is ready for them; in other words, he can *love* before he can *understand.*

One of the mistakes of our age is, that we begin by educating our children's *intellects* rather than their *emotions.* We leave these all-powerful factors, which give to life its coloring of light or darkness, to the oftentimes insufficient training of the ordinary family life—in-

sufficient, owing to its thousand interruptions and preoccupations. The results are, that many children grow up cold, hard, matter-of-fact, with little of poetry, sympathy, or ideality to enrich their lives,—mere Gradgrinds in God's world of beauty. We starve the healthful emotions of children in order that we may overfeed their intellects. Is not this doing them a great wrong? When the sneering tone is heard, and the question "Will it pay?" is the all-important one, do we not see the result of such training? Possibly the unwise training of the emotional nature may give it undue preponderance, producing morbid sentimentalists, who think that the New Testament would be greatly improved if the account of Christ driving the money-changers from the temple, or His denunciation of the Pharisees, could be omitted. Such people feed every able-bodied tramp brought by chance to their doors, and yet make no effort to lighten the burden of the poor sewing-women of our great cities, who are working at almost starvation prices. This is a minor danger, however. The education of the heart must advance along with that of the head, if well-balanced character is to be developed.

Pedagogy tells us that "*the science of educa-*

tion is the science of interesting;" and yet, but few pedagogues have realized the importance of *educating the interest of the child.* In other words, little or no value has been attached to the likes and dislikes of children; but in reality they are very important.

A child can be given any quantity of information, he can be made to get his lessons, he can even be crowded through a series of examinations, but that is not *educating* him. Unless his interest in the subject has been awakened, the process has been a failure. *Once get him thoroughly interested and he can educate himself, along that line, at least.*

Hence the value of toys; they are not only promoters of play, but they appeal to the sympathies and give exercise to the emotions; in this way a hold is gotten upon the child, by interesting him before more intellectual training can make much impression. The two great obstacles to the exercise of the right emotions are *fear* and *pity;* these do not come into the toy-world, hence we can see how toys, according to their own tendencies, help in the healthful education of the child's emotions, through his emotions the education of his thoughts, through his thoughts the education of his will, and hence his character.

One can readily see how this is so. By means of their dolls, wagons, drums, or other toys, children's thoughts are turned in certain directions. They play that they are mothers and fathers, or shop-keepers, or soldiers, as the case may be. Through their dramatic play, they become interested more and more in those phases of life which they have imitated, and that which they watch and imitate they become like.

The toy-shops of any great city are, to him who can read the signs of the times, prophecies of the future of that city. They not only predict the future career of a people, but they tell us of national tendencies. Seguin, in his report on the Educational exhibit at Vienna a few years ago, said: "The nations which had the most toys had, too, more individuality, ideality, and heroism." And again: "The nations which have been made famous by their artists, artisans, and idealists, supplied their infants with toys." It needs but a moment's thought to recognize the truth of this statement. Children who have toys exercise their *own* imagination, put into action their *own* ideals— Ah me, how much that means! What ideals have been strangled in the breasts of most of us because others did not think as we did! With the toy, an outline only is drawn ; the child must

fill in the details. On the other hand, in story books the details are given. Both kinds of training are needed; individual development, and participation in the development of others—of the world, of the past, of the *All*. With this thought of the influence of toys upon the life of nations, a visit to any large toy-shop becomes an interesting and curious study. The following is the testimony, unconsciously given, by the shelves and counters in one of the large importing establishments which gather together and send out the playthings of the world. The *French* toys include nearly all the pewter soldiers, all guns and swords; surely, such would be the toys of the nation which produced a Napoleon. All Punch and Judy shows are of French manufacture; almost all miniature theatres; all doll tea-sets which have wine glasses and finger bowls attached. The French *dolls* mirror the fashionable world, with all its finery and unneeded luxury, and hand it down to the little child. No wonder Frances Willard made a protest against dolls, if she had in mind the *French* doll.

"You see," said the guileless saleswoman, as she handed me first one and then another of these dolls, thinking doubtless that she had a slow purchaser whom she had to assist in

making a selection, "you can dress one of these dolls as a lady, or as a little girl, just as you like." And, sure enough, the very baby dolls had upon their faces the smile of the society flirt, or the deep passionate look of the woman who had seen the world. I beheld the French Salons of the eighteenth century still lingering in the nineteenth century dolls. All their toys are dainty, artistic, exquisitely put together, but lack strength and power of endurance, are low or shallow in aim, and are oftentimes inappropriate in the extreme. For instance, I was shown a Noah's Ark with a rose-window of stained glass in one end of it. Do we not see the same thing in French literature? Racine's Orestes, bowing and complimenting his Iphigenia, is the same French adornment of the strong, simple, Greek story that the pretty window was of the Hebrew Ark.

The *German* toys take another tone. They are heavier, stronger, and not so artistic, and largely represent the home and the more primitive forms of trade-life. From Germany we get all our ready-made doll-houses, with their clean tile floors and clumsy porcelain stoves, their parlors with round iron center-tables, and stiff, ugly chairs with the inevitable lace tidies. Here and there in these miniature houses we

see a tiny pot of artificial flowers. All such playthings tend to draw the child's thoughts to the home-life. Next come the countless number of toy butcher shops, bakers, blacksmiths, and other representations of the small, thrifty, healthful trade-life which one sees all over Germany. Nor is the child's love attracted toward the home and the shops alone. Almost all of the better class of toy horses and carts are of German manufacture. The "woolly sheep," so dear to childish heart, is of the same origin. Thus a love for simple, wholesome out-of-door activities is instilled.

And then the German dolls! One would know from the dolls alone that Germany was the land of Froebel and the birthplace of the Kindergarten, that it was the country where even the beer-gardens are softened and refined by the family presence. All the regulation ornaments for Christmas trees come from this nation, bringing with them memories of Luther; of his breaking away from the celibacy enjoined by the church; of his entering into the joyous family life, and trying to bring with him into the home life all that was sacred in the church—Christmas festivals along with the rest. Very few firearms come from this nation, but among them I saw some strong cast-iron

cannons from Berlin; they looked as if Bismarck himself might have ordered their manufacture.

The *Swiss* toys are largely the bluntly carved wooden cattle, sheep and goats, with equally blunt shepherds and shepherdesses, reminding one forcibly of the dull faces of those much-enduring beasts of burden called Swiss peasants. I once saw a Swiss girl who had sold to an American woman, for a few francs, three handkerchiefs, the embroidering of which had occupied the evenings of her entire winter; there was no look of discontent or disgust as the American tossed them into her trunk with a lot of other trinkets, utterly oblivious of the amount of human life which had been patiently worked into them. What kind of toys could come from a people among whom such scenes are accepted as a matter of course?

The *English* rag doll is peculiarly national in its placidity of countenance. The British people stand pre-eminent in the matter of story books for children, but, so far as I have been able to observe, are somewhat lacking in originality as to toys; possibly this is due to the out-of-door life encouraged among them.

When I asked to see the *American* toys, my guide turned, and with a sweep of her hand said: "These *trunks* are American. All doll-

trunks are manufactured in this country." Surely our Emerson was right when he said that "the tape-worm of travel was in every American." Here we see the beginning of the restless, migratory spirit of our people; even these children's toys suggest, "How nice it would be to pack up and go somewhere!" All tool-chests are of domestic origin. Seemingly, all the inventions of the Yankee mind are reproduced in miniature form to stimulate the young genius of our country.

The *Japanese* and *Chinese* toys are a curious study, telling of national traits as clearly as do their laws or their religion. They are enduable, made to last unchanged a long time ; no flimsy tinsel is used which can be admired for the hour, then cast aside. If "the hand of Confucius reaches down through twenty-four centuries of time still governing his people," so, too, can the carved ivory or inlaid wooden toy be used without injury or change by at least one or two successive generations of children.

Let us turn to the study of the development of the race as a whole, that we may the better grasp this thought. The toy not only directs the emotional activity of the child, but also forms a bridge between the great realities of

life and his small capacities. To man was given the dominion over the earth, but it was a potential dominion. He had to conquer the beasts of the field; to develop the resources of the earth; by his *own effort,* to subordinate all things else unto himself. We see the faint foreshadowing, or presentiment, of this in the myths and legends of the race. The famous wooden horse of Troy, accounts of which have come down to us in a dozen different channels of literature and history, seems to have been the forerunner of the nineteenth century bomb, which defies walls and leaps into the enemy's camp, scattering death and destruction in every direction. At least, the two have the same effect; they speedily put an end to physical resistance, and bring about consultation and settlement by arbitration. The labors of Hercules tell the same story in another form—man's power to make nature perform the labors appointed to him; the winged sandals of Hermes, Perseus' cloak of invisibility, the armor of Achilles, and a hundred other charming myths, all tell us of man's sense of his sovereignty over nature. The old Oriental stories of the enchanted carpet tell us that the sultan and his court had but to step upon it, ere it rose majestically and sailed unimpeded through the air,

and landed its precious freight at the desired destination. Is not this the dim feeling in the breasts of the childish race that *man* ought to have power to transcend space, and by his intelligence contrive to convey himself from place to place? Are not our luxurious palace cars almost fulfilling these early dreams? What are the fairy tales of the Teutonic people, which Grimm has so laboriously collected for us? They have lived through centuries of time, because they have told of genii and giant, governed by the will of puny man and made to do his bidding. Eagerly the race has read them, pleased to see symbolically pictured forth man's power over elements stronger than himself. In fact, the study of the race development is much like the study of those huge, almost-obliterated outlines upon the walls of Egyptian temples—dim, vague, fragmentary, yet giving us glimpses of insight and flashes of light, which aid much in the understanding of the meaning of to-day. We find the instincts of the race renewed in each new-born infant. Each individual child desires to master his surroundings. He cannot yet drive a real horse and wagon, but his very soul delights in the three-inch horse and the gaily painted wagon attached; he cannot tame real tigers

and lions, but his eyes dance with pleasure as he places and replaces the animals of his toy menagerie; he cannot at present run engines or direct railways, but he can control for a whole half-hour the movement of his miniature train; he is not yet ready for real fatherhood, but he can pet and play with, and rock to sleep, and tenderly guard the doll baby.

Dr. Seguin also calls attention to the fact that a handsomely dressed lady will be passed by unnoticed by a child, whereas her counterpart in a foot-long doll will call forth his most rapt attention ; the one is too much for the small brain, the other is just enough.

The boy who has a toy gun marches and drills and camps and fights many a battle before the real battle comes. The little girl who has a toy stove plays at building a fire and putting on a kettle long before these real responsibilities come to her.

A young mother, whose daughter had been for some time in a Kindergarten, came to me and said, "I have been surprised to see how my little Katherine handles the baby, and how sweetly and gently she talks to him." I said to the daughter, "Katherine, where did you learn how to talk to baby, and to take care of one so nicely?" "Why, that's the way we

talk to the dolly at Kindergarten!" she replied. Her powers of baby-loving had been developed definitely by the toy-baby, so that when the real baby came, she was ready to transfer her tenderness to the larger sphere. Thus, as I said before, toys form a bridge between the great realities and possibilities of life, and the small capacities of the child. If wisely selected, they lead him on from conquering yet to conquer. Thus he enters ever widening and increasing fields of activity, until he stands as God intended he should stand, the master of all the elements and forces about him, until he can bid the solid earth, "Bring forth thy treasures;" until he can say unto the great ocean, "Thus far shalt thou go and no farther;" until he can call unto the quick lightning, "Speak thou my words across a continent;" until he can command the fierce fire, "Do thou my bidding;" and earth, and air, and fire, and water, become the servants of the divine intelligence which is within him.